

Alternative pronunciation

A different way of pronouncing a grapheme. For example, the letters 'ow' can represent the sounds /ow/ as in 'crown' and /oa/ as in 'snow'.

Alternative spelling

A different way of spelling a phoneme. For example, the sound /w/ can be represented in writing by 'w' as in 'wave' and 'wh' as in 'what'.

Blend

To combine individual phonemes into a whole word, working all the way through from left to right. Once the graphemes have been learned, blending is the key process involved in reading words effectively. It is a skill that needs extensive practise. Practising oral blending is very helpful, both before and during the process of learning to read. It is important to understand that blending sounds into a word is not simply a matter of saying them more quickly, nor of mixing them together like paint. Phonemes need to be joined into one continuous stream of sound to make a spoken word.

Digraph

A grapheme using two letters to represent one phoneme. With children, we frequently reinforce it with the mantra 'two letters, one sound'.

GPC

This stands for grapheme–phoneme correspondence, the sound–letter relationship between each element of the alphabetic code.

Grapheme

A letter or group of letters used to represent a particular phoneme when writing. With children, we sometimes call this 'a sound written down', although, as with 'phoneme', it is helpful for children to learn to use the correct term from the beginning. The way graphemes are used to represent phonemes in our written language is known as the 'alphabetic code'.

Oral blending

A technique for the early practise of blending. Articulates each phoneme in a word separately, in order, and children then respond by saying the whole word aloud. Alternatively, they can be asked to blend the word silently and show they have done so by putting their hands on their head. Such practice is valuable both before and during the early stages of learning to read and is also known as 'sound-talk'. Children in Reception frequently practise oral blending by playing games such as 'Can you touch your...l-e-g, ch-ee-k, n-e-ck'.

Phoneme

The smallest unit of sound that can be identified in words. We sometimes simply call this a 'sound', although it is helpful for children to use the term 'phoneme'. We deliberately separate sounds so that children can learn how our writing–reading system works. Children are first helped to identify the separate sounds in words through oral blending and segmenting.

Phonics

The method by which we teach children to read by recognising the connections between the sounds of spoken words (phonemes) and the letters that are used to write them down (graphemes).

Pure sounds

The way in which the phoneme is pronounced, for example 't' rather than 'tuh', taking care not to add 'uh' on the end (This is known as schwaring).

Split vowel digraph

A digraph representing a vowel sound where its two letters are split by an consonant (for example, 'a_e' in 'take'). Despite having a consonant in between them, the two letters involved (here 'a' and 'e') still count as one digraph, making one sound. The vowel sound is pronounced at the position of the first of the two letters of the digraph (that is, in the middle of 'take'). At early learning stages, a split digraph is often highlighted with a short line joining the two halves of the digraph above the intervening consonant, as shown below.



take

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Segment

To identify each of the individual phonemes in a word, working all the way through from left to right. This is an important first stage of writing (spelling) a word but needs to be practised orally first. Counting the phonemes is often helpful in reinforcing this process.

Tricky word

High-frequency words that, although decodable in themselves, cannot be decoded by children using the GPCs they have been taught up to that point. Not all high-frequency words are 'tricky words'. Many tricky words cease to be tricky in the later stages as more GPCs are learned.

Trigraph

A grapheme using three letters to represent one phoneme for example igh in **light**. With children, we frequently reinforce it with the mantra 'three letters, one sound'.